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ABSTRACT

Critical pedagogy is fundamentally and ultimately linked with critical literacy. There can be no liberation of self or other without tools or language to perform counter-readings of dominant texts that serve the interests of power. Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo's work has, for some time, been a cornerstone for critical literacy, a model of teaching literacy and interacting with dominant texts in empowering ways. Critical pedagogists have necessarily focused on critical consumption of dominant texts, but this paper argues for a change in focus from consumption to production, or critical textual production. The paper notes that moving from consumption to production in critical literacy instruction necessarily requires at least a meaningful dialogue between the discourses of critical pedagogy and rhetoric and composition as writing instructors consider how they teach students to construct texts that serve as counter narratives to these dominant texts that they have gained the ability to deconstruct. It argues that the consumptive aspect of critical literacy will not be lost, rather it will be subsumed in the process of producing alternate texts such as Web sites, brochures, editorials, research reports, essays, and fictional works. The paper urges college educators to heed the necessary call of critical composition pedagogy, to help students prepare for writing lives as engaged citizens and not just students or future professionals. Drawing from the work of Freire and Macedo, the paper proposes several core tenets of critical composition pedagogies: Historicity; Problem Posing; Dialogic; Emancipatory; and Praxis. It describes a critical research and writing seminar, one example of how critical composition might happen in the context of a university writing course. Lists 12 works cited. (NKA)

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Writing the Word and the World: Critical Literacy as Critical Textual Production

A paper presented at the annual meeting of the

Conference on College Composition and Communication

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On Critical Textual Production

Those of us who teach literacy as a tool of resistance and social change are indebted to the work of critical pedagogists who have given us a language to describe and deconstruct structures of oppression in the cause of social justice. McLaren asserts that:

> Critical pedagogy challenges the assumption that schools function as major sites of social and economic mobility. Proponents of this pedagogical theory suggest that schooling must be analyzed as a cultural and historical process, in which select groups are positioned within asymmetrical relations of power on the basis of specific race, class, and gender groupings (166).

According to McLaren, critical scholars reject the claim that schooling constitutes an apolitical and value-neutral process (167). Critical pedagogy attempts to provide teachers and researchers with a better means of understanding the role that schools actually play within a race-, class-, and gender-divided society. In this effort, theorists have generated categories or concepts for questioning student experiences, texts, teacher ideologies, and aspects of school policy that conservative and liberal analyses too often leave unexplored (167).

Darder asserts that the core tenets of critical pedagogy are also conducive to the needs of bicultural students—students who must learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments; their primary culture and that of the dominant mainstream culture in the society in which they live (48). Darder contends that a critical bicultural pedagogy:

> ...can create the conditions for bicultural students to develop the courage to question the structures of domination that control their lives. In this way, they can awaken their bicultural voice as they participate in opportunities to reflect, critique, and act together with other bicultural students who are also experiencing the same process of discovery. Hence, these students are not just provided with curricular content that in considered culturally appropriate and language instruction in their native tongues. Rather, they are actively involved in considering critically all curriculum content, texts, classroom experiences, and their own lives for the emancipatory as well as oppressive and contradictory values that inform their thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. Through this process, bicultural students develop their abilities to understand critically their lives and how to engage actively with the world (96).

A generation of critical educators has been inspired to enact pedagogical practices that enable a bicultural, marginalized opposition to read and act against the interests of power while inspiring movements of change. We continue enhanced, but not halted or deterred by ludic postmodernists who rail against concepts such as critical consciousness or warn against adherence to any totalizing narratives, even narratives of resistance. We continue steadfast in project of emancipation amid a contemporary moment pregnant with ultraconservative tendencies and intellectuals paralyzed by doubt and angst. Rather than reciprocate dismissal, we advocate a critical pedagogy that is compatible with and even inclusive of postmodern critiques of earlier iterations of our discourse. Like Jameson (402), we simultaneously pay serious attention to the warranted critiques of Enlightenment thinking while holding fast to rhetorics of resistance.

Aronowitz and Giroux argue that the challenge of postmodernism is important for critical educators because it raises crucial questions regarding certain hegemonic aspects of modernism and, by implication, how these have affected the meaning and dynamics of present-day schooling. Postmodernist criticism is also important because it offers the promise of deterritoralizing modernism and redrawing its political, social, and cultural boundaries, while simultaneously affirming a politics of racial, gender, and ethnic difference. Moreover, postmodern criticism does not merely challenge dominant Western cultural models with their attendant notion of universally valid knowledge; it also resituates us within a world that bears little resemblance to the one that inspired the grand narratives of Marx and Freud. In effect, postmodern criticism calls attention to the shifting boundaries related to the increasing influence of the electronic mass media and information technology, the changing nature of class and social formations in postindustrialized capitalist societies, and the growing transgression of boundaries between life and art, high and popular culture, and image and reality (59). Aronowitz and Giroux ultimately argue for a critical postmodernism that develops forms of pedagogy that incorporate difference, plurality, and the language of the everyday as central to the production and legitimization of learning (187).

In a similar vein, McLaren advocates the construction of a politics of difference, derived from the framework of resistance postmodernism, which creates narratives of liberation and freedom that critique master narratives, yet doesn't disintegrate into chaos and fragmentation. He concludes by encouraging educators to take up the issue of difference in ways that don't reinforce notions of monocultural essentialism and to create politics of alliance that move beyond race awareness week. He also advocates a

resistance postmodernism that takes multiculturalism seriously calling attention to the dominant meaning systems readily available to students, most of which are ideologically stitched into the fabric of Western imperialism (214). Finally, he calls for a critical pedagogy that provides both the conditions for interrogating the institutionalization of formal equality based on the imperatives of a white, Anglo male world and for creating spaces to facilitate an investigation of the way in which dominant institutions can be transformed so they no longer reinforce indifference to victimization and asymmetrical relations of power and privilege.

This critical postmodern pedagogy opens up ample spaces for critical educators who are interested in literacy instruction for social change. Critical pedagogy is, of course, fundamentally and intimately linked with critical literacy. There can be no liberation of self or other without tools or language to perform counter-readings of dominant texts that serve the interests of power. Freire (55) remarks that acceptance of dehumanizing conditions is promoted via a banking metaphor of education where teachers are charged to disseminate knowledge to passive and empty receptacles of students who then embrace problematic and subordinating logics that are passed on as neutral and natural maxims for life. Reading, in this model, is simply decoding messages that are sent by power brokers through hegemonic curricula and media narratives. Freire and Macedo, by contrast, promote a framework for critical reading as a part of radical pedagogy that:

> ...has as its goal to enable students to become critical of the hegemonic practices that have shaped their experiences and perceptions in hopes of freeing themselves from the bonds of these dominating ideologies (55).

Freire and Macedo's work has, for some time, been a cornerstone for critical literacy; a model of teaching literacy and interacting with dominant texts in empowering ways. Reading, for these scholars, is a counterhegemonic activity. It is active in the sense that it is also a freeing of one's self from the seemingly unyielding grasp of dominant narratives.

Critical literacy educators, however, cannot be satisfied with a reading of Freire and Macedo's work that only supports instruction to develop students who are able to read the word and the world, so to speak. Critical literacy instruction needs to fundamentally be concerned with the consumption, production, and distribution of texts; counter-texts that not only name and delimit the workings of power, but critical texts that serve as the manifestation of an alternate reality or a not-yet-realized present that only enters into the imagination through the interaction with new and authentically liberating words that are created by writers as cultural workers. Critical pedagogists have necessarily focused on the critical consumption of dominant texts, but this paper argues for a change in focus from consumption to production—what I call *Critical Textual Production* (CTP). Moving from a model of consumption to production in critical literacy instruction necessarily requires a synthesis or at least a meaningful dialogue between the discourses of critical pedagogy and rhetoric and composition as writing instructors consider how is it that we teach students to construct texts that serve as

counternnarratives to these dominant texts that they have gained the ability to deconstruct.

Compositionists and rhetoricians are perfectly poised to help emergent writers to gain understanding of the power of language through the production of critical texts (Gallagher 126). I argue that the consumptive aspect of critical literacy will not be lost; rather it will be subsumed in the process of producing alternate texts such as web sites, brochures, editorials, research reports, essays, and fictional works. I urge college-level educators to heed the necessary call of critical composition pedagogy; to help students prepare for writing lives as engaged citizens and not just university students or future professionals. Certainly we want students to master the discourses of university, but we also want them to perceive writing as something that begets more than superior grades in courses or entrance into rewarding careers. Writing can be about re-making and re-articulating reality. As many classical and modern rhetoricians have held, those who have the power to manipulate language have the power to rule the world.

Ultimately, as literacy educators, we must consider the genres of texts that students will need to produce in their lives as engaged citizens and forefront these in the composition programs as we strive to develop a generation of critical composers whose texts challenge us to reconsider our world. These courses on critical community-based research and writing for social justice will necessarily entail the creation of selections that blur textual genres, cross the fictional divide in having students use stories, poems, even film to portray alternate realities, and infuse new media into the critical composition

process. Instructors of these courses will need to devise strategies to meaningfully distribute student-generated critical texts giving them a utility that is larger than the actual class. The resulting critical textual production can become a way to excite students about the possibilities of writing for social change, not just learning to navigate the various discourses of a university or a profession. It is a composing process centered within the existential experiences of people, it is for people. It is personal and political all in one.

It is important, then, for composition pedagogists to theorize, through examinations of their practice, the elements of praxis that will lead to the production of critical texts that contribute to the struggle for liberation and social change. Drawing from the work of Freire and Macedo, I propose several core tenets of critical composition pedagogies that aspire to these lofty goals: 1. *Historicity.* Critical composition pedagogy must begin with students' experiences as citizens of the word. 2. *Problem-posing.* A critical composition pedagogy must embrace, as its curriculum, the real world problems and struggles of marginalized people in the world. 3. *Dialogic. A* critical composition pedagogy must entail authentic humanizing interactions with people in the world. 4. *Emancipatory.* A critical composition pedagogy must confront social injustice and have as its project liberation from oppressive realities; and 5. *Praxis.* A critical composition pedagogy must be about action and reflection upon that action.

Other important considerations for critical composition pedagogists concern: the nature of relationships between participants, who has voice and authority to speak and write, and what counts as legitimate work. In their chapter on "Rethinking Critical

Theory and Qualitative Research," Kincheloe and McLaren identify new "standards" for critical scholarship (286-287). The authors promote humility as opposed to arrogance or assuredness, trustworthiness in lieu of validity, collective participation instead of individual authorship, and lived experience rather than predetermined methodological or theoretical approaches. These tenets are so central to the transformational writing associated with critical composition pedagogy that they were highlighted in a university-level literacy course I offer to inner city high school teens for college credit during a summer session. A description and reflection upon this course hereafter referred to as the critical research and writing seminar is the subject of the following section.

The critical research and writing seminar described in the following section is but one example of how critical composition might happen in the context of a university writing course. The work of the seminar is not presented as a study. What I report are not findings or answers per se. What I am putting forth is a *theory of praxis*—a description and reflection upon a critical composition practice to be interrogated and discussed by other literacy educators. In no way am I implying that the practice is without flaws or gaps. Rather I am hoping that subsequent readings; reflections upon my descriptions of an intentional action and reflections upon that action will then generate more thoughtful and powerful future actions in critical composition pedagogy. I have been positively affected by critical composition educators who have shared their critical praxis in composition courses. The critical research and writing seminar exists in a dialectical relationship with the work of scholars such as Ira Shor, bell hooks, and Amy Lee who have been so courageous as to expose themselves through their descriptions and

reflections upon Freirian-inspired composition teaching. It is in this sprit and tradition that the description of the seminar follows.

The Critical Research Seminar

Briefly, the critical research and writing seminar is a college-level course, offered during the summer session at West Coast University, which has targeted incoming high school seniors from underrepresented schools and communities in urban Los Angeles. Most of the students come from racially, ethnically, or socioeconomically oppressed groups. The stated goals of the seminar are to teach these students the craft of critical research in order to promote academic literacy, college-readiness, and the tools advocate for social change. The students selected are not creamed for academic performance or readiness for college-level writing. Instead, students are chosen based on their interest in issues related to the transformation of urban schools and communities. Students are required to write an entrance essay speaking to their interests. These essays are rated on content rather than form. As a general practice, though, we have accepted as many students as we can possibly hold in a given year. We have no desire to deny any students that we can accommodate. Over the life of the seminar, students have entered with cumulative grade point averages ranging from 1.0 to 4.8.

The seminar has met at West Coast University for each of the past four summers. The thirty or so student participants attend all day sessions for five weeks to earn a semester credit for a university course. As a part of the seminar, students are exposed to critical theory, cultural studies, educational sociology, legal history, social theory, and critical qualitative research methodology as they design and conduct research related to

issues of equity and access in urban schools and communities. In this way, the seminar seeks to address these issues of access both in terms of course content and desired outcomes for its students. Over the past four years, the seminar has addressed the following themes: *Language, Youth Culture, and Transformational Resistance in Urban Schools* (1999), *Youth Access and the Democratic National Convention* (2000), *An Educational Bill of Rights* (2001), and *Equity and Access in California's Public Schools* (2002). Student participants have presented their research from the seminar to university faculty, local and state politicians, teachers, community members, and parents. Additionally, this research has been presented at regional and national conferences and has been featured by local and national media, including CNN.

How, specifically, does the seminar promote critical textual production and to what ends? First off, writing is not an isolated task from the seminar; writing is absolutely necessary to the work of the seminar. It is, at once, the means and the end of the seminar. Students compose continually in the form of journals, lecture and discussion notes, literature summaries, field notes, interview protocols, analytic memos, research reports and PowerPoint presentations. To support their writing, students are armed with laptop computers and composition notebooks that they use when "in the field."

On the first day, we begin with an introduction by having students dialogue about their experience of urban schooling. Inevitably, students who attend some of the poorest schools in the nation are quick to take advantage of the opportunity to share the deplorable conditions of their schooling. Many, who have completed twelve years of public schooling, admit that it is the first time anyone has asked them such a question.

Responses are candid and often emotional as students gain affinity through the sharing of personal and often painful narratives of schooling. Freire encourages critical educators to use people's historicity as a starting point in any liberatory dialogue:

> Dialogue is the encounter between humans, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. Those who have been denied their primordial right to speak their word must first reclaim this right and prevent the continuation of dehumanizing aggression. If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings (69).

By situating that initial critical dialogue simultaneously in the personal and social worlds of urban teens, and by making explicit and immediate connections between dialogue and writing, the seminars two composing trajectories are initiated; writing for personal understanding and writing for social change.

Over the course of the seminar, students will write to learn more about their own experiences as youth attempting to navigate an often troubled world. Later during the first day of class, students are given their laptops, shown how to plug in, and asked to respond, for thirty minutes to the following prompt:

> Recall an experience you've had with a teacher that you remember vividly. The memory can be vivid either because it is especially positive, painful, or unique. In as much detail as possible re-tell this narrative and explain what makes it so emotional for you.

Students, who are all plugged into the Ethernet and given e-mail accounts if they don't already have one, e-mail their responses daily to their literacy teachers, generally practicing K-12 teachers in the Los Angeles area or graduate students at the university. The students then receive daily feedback on their responses via e-mail comments and dialogue with fellow students and teachers in the seminar. These writing prompts will culminate in the creation of an individually-created critical text that reflects upon the processes of critical literacy and critical research. In our most recent seminar, students had these four options to choose between:

1. *A Critical Memoir:* Write a critical memoir that recounts a portion of your educational experience. Explain the event in as much detail as possible. Use theory to make sense of the event. Use your knowledge of critical research to discuss what could have been done differently.
2. *On Being a Critical Researcher:* Talk about your journey as a critical researcher. What have you learned? What advice would you offer to others (students, teachers, parents, community activists) who may be considering such an enterprise?
3. *A Personal Letter:* Write a personal letter to an author, an artist, ancestor, or other activist who has influenced your journey as a critical researcher. Explain to this person (or people) how they have shaped your image of yourself as a critical researcher.
4. *An Issue Piece:* Write a brief essay to a policymaker or an elected official, in which you combine experience and theory to discuss an issue related to equity and access. This topic doesn't have to relate to your group's research project.

These individual essays are critical texts in that they allow students a different, more enabling language to make sense of their own experiences. They also generate different relationships, not only to those experiences, but to the structures in which they occurred. They are also critical texts because they are shared with others, either others in similar situations such as students and parents, or others, such as teachers, researchers, and policymakers, who are in a position to transform these realities. For example, student texts were published in an online journal that receives thousands of hits and are also being considered as mini chapters in a *Handbook on Critical Research* to be published and distributed to local and national audiences. Several students have submitted their work to other outlets including school newspapers and non-mainstream publications.

The second writing trajectory is writing for social transformation. After beginning with students' personal experiences in urban schools and communities, the seminar then moves toward reading, research, and writing activities designed to provide explanations for the current inequities in urban schools and communities that are not rooted in deficit logic. These problem-posing sessions transition into the development of research questions; questions that the students initiate as they work in teams of four or five under the guidance of a practicing teacher in Los Angeles area schools. In past seminars, students have studied the media's portrayal of urban youth, the potential role of hip-hop music and culture in school curricula, teens access to a livable wage, teacher quality, school safety, and the digital divide to name a few.

A significant portion of the seminar is spent "in the field," or in the streets and neighborhoods of Los Angeles. One year, we situated the seminar within the Democratic

National Convention. Students attended rallies, protest marches, and community forums in addition to circulating among delegates, media personnel, and candidates for political office. During other years, students have visited school sites to dialogue with students and teachers about the material conditions urban schooling and their personal experiences in urban schools and classrooms. Research teams have also visited community centers and surveyed neighborhoods in search of learning resources and access to technology. One group used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to map the distribution of liquor stores to libraries in a densely populated low-income census tract within the city. They located fifty-eight active liquor stores and one semi-functional library in a neighborhood with 77,000 residents squeezed into a two-mile radius.

Composing is a key activity while in the field. Students transport their laptops or composition notebooks wherever they go and they will be seen scribbling field notes on a city bus en route to a march, transcribing interviews with journalists and candidates, writing analytical memos, or performing preliminary analyses of a media survey. Some have even been inspired to produce an editorial or cross the fictional divide to compose poetry or song lyrics that help to make sense of what they are seeing and learning. As the seminar progresses, we attempt to get better about opening up spaces for students to compose in genres that we hadn't anticipated. Such freedom for the students produces a challenge for the literacy teachers, forcing them to step outside of their experience and expertise. Though it may be an uncomfortable movement, I argue that it is an important one; to presume, as literacy educators, that we possess all of the writing expertise that our students require is to limit their potential to produce innovative and revolutionary texts.

Seminar participants also have access to digital video cameras and audio recorders, which they utilize to capture and incorporate sounds and images into their final group texts. In a recent seminar a group of students assembled digital video footage taken from a school site into a video montage that they then looped over a hip-hop soundtrack as evidence of the social and physical ecology of the school. Other groups have used digital photographs to augment their reports on neighborhood conditions or on youth popular culture. In our upcoming seminar, we plan to be more systematic and intentional in infusing new media and digital rhetorics into the working of the seminar. We have contracted a guerilla filmmaking crew and internet activists to help us challenge and expand our notions of critical textual production.

Once out of the field, students return to the university to perform data analysis and to assemble the final group reports and presentations. Guidelines have evolved over the years to include the following:

1. **Introduction**
    a. **The Problem (Justification for the Research)**-This should be the initial portion of the introduction where you explain the relevance of the research you are conducting.
    b. **The Research Question** -Given the need for the research, what specific question is your study attempting to answer? Why is your question significant or important?

2. **Literature Review**

    a. Upon what theories or prior studies are you basing your research? What are the terms or concepts that need defining? How does your study build on these theories and concepts?

3. **Methods**

    a. Describe in detail, the schools, classrooms, students, politicians, activists, community members, etc. that you encountered in your study. To ensure anonymity, choose pseudonyms for the schools and all people you include in the study.

    b. Explain the process or method your paper will employ to explore the question that you have asked? Will you conduct interviews, surveys, perform ethnographic research, or design an experiment? What is the rationale behind your methodology?

4. **Reporting of Findings**

    a. This is the body or meat of your paper where you introduce, cite, synthesize, and critique the data that you collect.

5. **Conclusion**

    a. What significance do these findings hold for educational policy and research? What do these findings suggest about the broader issue of youth access? What further research would you suggest? How would you like to pursue these issues in the 2002-2003 school year? Based on your expert status, you need to take some

leadership and exert some authority to help solve the problems you mention in your introduction.

6. **References**

   a. You are required to have a minimum of 3 references to readings.

   b. All papers will cite references using the APA style

Although the guidelines for the final papers may seem overly regimented, there is a definite goal to help the students to have confidence in writing traditional research reports. One of our charges was to "demonstrate" to administrators and policymakers that students who were not gaining entry into the university could indeed perform the literacy tasks associated with university coursework. During this final week of the seminar, a great deal of attention is paid to composition. Students meet in the mornings to discuss their individual essays and in the afternoons they work as research teams to compose their research papers.

Each year, student papers and presentations are witnessed and commented upon by faculty at the university as an assessment of the quality of the student work. Students have subsequently given lectures and presentations to graduate seminars in education and sociology; their papers have been presented to: the California Writing Project (CWP), the National Coalition of Educational Activists (NCEA), and the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Further, the student-initiated, student-generated research has influenced state legislation, most notably through the Educational Bill of Rights in the State of California, which was sponsored by Representative Judy Chu. Finally, and most importantly, this research has helped the student participants to acquire much

needed skills for academic advancement, professional membership, and civic engagement.

The critical research and writing seminar is not without problems or challenges. As director, I struggle with issues of control versus freedom in determining how much of the seminar needs to be pre-planned to ensure efficiency and how much needs to be responsive to the emergent dialogue among the students. I am frequently aware of the contradictions of my heavy handedness when selecting readings and class assignments, but I also worry about offering a seminar that is haphazard and chaotic or asks too much of students too soon. I also struggle with trying to find a balance between experiences in the field and serious time devoted to the craft of composition. Without the field experiences, students lose access to writing material and they lose opportunities to engage in socially meaningful activity. However, without sufficient time devoted to writing, students end up with brilliant, but incomplete thoughts and they lose the opportunity to develop great material into great writing. Further, no matter what we try or say to students and teachers down the stretch of the seminar, there is a pressure and a stress that I would like to eliminate while maintaining the focused energy that is the source of creative genius.

Another serious challenge that we face in the seminar is that of sustainability. Real world struggles do not emerge and play themselves out in the cycle of a university course. We are left at the end of each seminar with the students and the populations we work with wanting more long-term and sustained involvement. Although we have maintained relationships with the schools and communities that participate in the research

and have established a virtual network along with a few satellite research and writing programs at selected school sites, we have not done a good job of maintaining focus and supporting the varied projects that students want to pursue once they leave the seminar. This is an issue that we continue to work on. After all, struggling against injustice is a long-term endeavor, just as learning to write is a continuing project. This represents a fundamental challenge for critical composition pedagogists to provide meaningful and enduring support to our students and the communities where they work once we have entered into collaborative relationships with them.

Such sustained collaborations are exceedingly difficult given the structure of colleges and universities and the requirements of writing instructors, who must teach courses and serve on department and school-wide committees in addition to getting research and writing done. What I advocate, however, is a synthesis of these activities through repeated engagement with similar community sites and struggles, even if in the context of different classes. Further, rhetoric and composition programs can get creative about how to develop advanced composition courses and independent studies that will facilitate longer relationships with students, more substantive relationships between students and communities, and more carefully-produced texts. It may even be possible to secure course credit for such activities. Finally, the continued engagement with students and communities opens up multiple avenues for research and writing.

On the whole, however, there is ample evidence to suggest that students enjoy and are enriched by their seminar experience. In follow-up interviews and surveys, students comment that they learned a great deal and were inspired to continued work for social

justice. Students keep in touch via e-mail communication and contributions to the university-sponsored web site. Faculty members from across the university have consistently testified to the quality of student research and writing and have invited student researchers to guest lecture in their university seminars. Approximately 95% of the seminar participants have either been accepted to or are attending two and four-year colleges and universities. Many continue to work with the seminar either as researchers or as mentors to a future generation of critical scholars and there is always more interest on the part of recent alumni than there is space or money to accommodate them.

The work of the students in the seminar also has a large impact on the populations that they interact with for their study. For instance, in our most recent seminar, the students visited an inner city middle school to explore the facilities and conduct focus group interviews with students, teachers, custodial staff, and administrators. After the focus group interviews, we stayed on the campus for lunch. Once word had passed about the nature of the interviews, the seminar students were swamped by literally hundreds of the middle schoolers demanding that their stories be heard. Several of the middle school students were interested in knowing how they could become part of the seminar movement. There was a similar occurrence at one of the poorest high schools in the county where the seminar students also visited. After conducting focus group interviews, which were in reality more like dialogues, a growing number of the school's population followed our seminar students around the school attempting to learn more about the nature of the research and sharing more about their experiences at the school. Again, the seminar students were barraged with comments such as, "What can we do?" and "How can I join?" For these "research subjects" simply having the opportunity to have their

stories be requested and to publicly utter their narratives of schooling was an enabling experience.

Critical Composition as Re-Writing the Word and the World

I can think of no better purpose for college writing courses than to take up the charge of developing writers as engaged citizens and transformative intellectuals who see writing as a tool, if not the tool of social change. For some, this is a radical reconceptualization from considerations of composition as fundamentally about helping students to master the discourses of academia and the professions. Certainly this is a worthwhile pursuit and should not be abandoned; though it should be complemented by a more socially-oriented focus. Students do not only need the tools of writing, they need a purpose for writing that extends beyond scholastic or professional success on one hand, and a better understanding of themselves on the other hand. What students need is an association of composition with advocacy, with activism, with empowerment, and with revolution. Freire has said that the act of studying is, itself, revolutionary. I would add to that that the composing of critical texts is a revolutionary act. I contend strongly that writing courses centered upon critical textual production can accomplish these multiple aims; that critical writing will increase student motivation as well as engagement with and production of traditional academic texts.

Consistent with the tenets of critical pedagogy, critical textual production is situated within the experiences of students and uses their experiences and real-world experiences and struggles as a starting point, but it quickly becomes about the business of social justice. Critical textual production is about naming oppression, certainly, but it is

also about eradicating oppression and injustice through the creation of counter-texts, critical texts, that present alternate realities as they simultaneously critique the existing narratives that promote the status quo.

Imagine a college course, Critical Writing 101, where the syllabus emanates from critical and liberating dialogue and the classroom becomes the world manifested through real communities engaged in real struggles. And the words created, generated by students in collaboration with community-members and fellow cultural workers are authentic in that they reveal the world even as they re-write it. The actual process and products of critical textual production in this course are counterhegemonic.

And the process of engaging or even mastering academic rhetorics is not lost; rather it too is subsumed within the authentic, problem-posing dialogue in that the students contemplate discourses of power as they wrestle with how to articulate effectively to multiple audiences; a goal demanding that they acknowledge and incorporate academic and cultural rhetorics. The continual writing and re-writing are not then requirements demanded by an instructor, they are self-demanded in the process of making the most compelling case or painting the most vivid portrait of a counter-reality possible.

In the process of creating liberating memory through critical literacy; leaving words as legacy, real words, true words, life-transforming words for this and future generations, the need for the writing process is self-evident to students. I have seen this in the writing for the seminar where students are up all hours of the night during their summer vacations working on assignments that are "ungraded." They are not writing for

approval or evaluation. They believe, and rightly so, that their words matter. This is nothing new in that many compositionists speak to the importance of creating a meaningful audience. It is different, however, in advocating that instructors think first and foremost about a meaningful purpose; active engagement with local and global struggles for liberation and change. When writing is not about preparation for some future outcome, such as a "good" grade, admission to an elite graduate program, or a well-paying job; rather writing is itself an action of import to the moment; when literacy is life—generative and regenerative, sustaining revolutionary discourse through composers with the courage and confidence to contribute commentary and contestation in chaotic times.

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